

My argument is that we quadrupled the debt of this country between 1981 and 1992. And I don't believe we should be even discussing the tax cut until we decide what our obligations are—to deal with the aging of America. And let me say, this is not just an issue for you—I mean, for us. I mean, I'm the oldest of the baby boomers. But it's not just an issue for us. It is an issue for you. Why? Because I can tell you that my generation is absolutely obsessed with the notion that if we retire, there will be so many of us that we will break the bank of Social Security and Medicare and we'll have to depend on our kids to support us and then our children won't have the money they need to raise our grandchildren.

So this—when you hear about the Social Security and Medicare debate, it's not just about senior citizens. It's about the compact between the generations in America and whether we can continue to, in effect, let seniors take care of themselves by and large so that their children by and large will be free to take care of their grandchildren. That's really what is going on here.

So—and if I had my way, we would decide this issue in the following order: We would decide what are we going to do—what does it take to fix Social Security and Medicare; what do we have to have to take care of education, defense, research, and the things that we should do as a nation? And then let's take what's left over and give it back in a tax cut. The way we're having the discussion about the size of the tax cut first, it would be like if you go home this weekend, when you finish, you go home and you have dinner and your folks say to you, "You know, we have always wanted to take this month-long vacation to Hawaii, and we're going to take it. We're going to fly first-class; we're going to go to the most expensive hotels; we're going to have everything we've ever dreamed of. And when we get home, we'll figure out whether we can pay the home mortgage and send you to college." [*Laughter*] Now, you being—I'm sure you need the vacation. I'm sure it would be a good thing. [*Laughter*] But you wouldn't make the decision in that order.

So that's the debate we're having here, in part. I believe that a lot of people who voted

for this tax cut, they know I'm going to veto it if it passes, so they don't think it will be law. And they want to be on record as, "I was for a bigger tax cut than President Clinton was." But what we should be doing, I think, is saying, "Hey, we have—once in a lifetime you get this kind of chance where there's no more deficit, projected surpluses, and you know what the big challenges of the country are. You know it's dealing with the aging of America, dealing with the education of our children, dealing with keeping the economy going and bringing economic opportunity to people who haven't felt it. There are other things, but let's just focus on those three." I think we ought to decide what we ought to do.

And let me give you an idea of what would happen if a tax cut of this size were to become law, so you can focus on it. Because there is no such thing as a free decision. It is your money, and if you tell the Congress you want it back, they could by enough—if they could override my veto, they could give it all back to you. I mean, everything you give us is your money. We could abolish the Department of Defense tomorrow and everything else we do and give it all back to you and have no Federal Government. So it is your money.

But let me give you an example. If we pass the tax cut, and we stayed with a balanced budget, according to our Office of Management and Budget, here's what the consequences would be. Today we're helping 12 million children in high-poverty areas get extra help. I have proposed reforms to raise standards for them and give them more help. This plan, if it passed, with this tax cut, would require us to say to 6 million of those children, "We can't help you."

Today, we provide funds to help a million children learn to read independently by the end of the third grade. If the tax plan passes, we'd have to say to 480,000 of them, "We're sorry; we can't do that."

Today, we're nearing our goal of enrolling a million people in Head Start. If the plan passes, we'd have to say to 430,000 preschoolers, "We can't do that."

Last year we reached across party lines to hire 30,000 of that 100,000 teachers I talked about. It was a wonderful moment—like

when we passed the balanced budget in '97, overwhelming majorities of both parties in both Houses; when we passed welfare reform in '96, overwhelming majorities of both parties in both Houses. That's the way the country ought to work. And we did that last year. And it will allow us, as I said, if we finish the job, to reduce class size to an average of 18 in the first 3 grades. But if the tax cut passes, and we keep a balanced budget, we'd have to say to a million students, "No smaller classes."

So I think this is a big problem. Today, we're helping 400,000 students with after-school programs. This is a huge deal. Every inner-city, tough neighborhood that has after-school programs that are aggressive sees a big drop in the juvenile crime rate and a big increase in learning in the schools. We propose to triple the number of people who would be included in those programs next year. If this tax plan passes, we'd have to cut that in half.

The school construction tax cut I mentioned to you earlier, to help us build or modernize 6,000 schools, ironically, is not in the plan. In this plan, only 10 percent of that many schools would be fixed.

Now, these are not just numbers; these are children. And keep in mind, most of you are going to be fine regardless. I mean, you got to Girls Nation, you got to Boys Nation. Somebody will give you a scholarship if your family doesn't have the money to go to college. You have to ask yourself whether you will be better off if your country is better off. If we try to make sure that we all go forward together—you came here because you believed in the American system, a system that is designed not to just address the needs of the most talented and the most fortunate among us but a system premised on the fact that nearly everybody, nearly everybody in a free country can do what is necessary to be a good, productive, hard-working citizen if given the tools to do so. And I believe that.

The reverse is true, that those of us who are most fortunate will also have the quality of our lives diminished to the extent that we do not provide everyone the chance to live up to their God-given abilities. So that's what's going on now. And believe me, this

is an honest, philosophical debate. If the people who disagree with me were here, they would say, "Well, we just think Government wastes too much money, and this is your money, and you paid the taxes, and we ought to give it back to you."

There's another element here I want to say to be fair. We might keep spending all this money, but if we did that and pass the tax cut, then we'd be right back in the same fix we were in before I took office—huge debts, higher interest rates dragging down the economy, higher unemployment. So I know it's easier for me to say, maybe, because I'm not running for anything. You know—under our system we have a two-term limit, and I can't run for anything unless I go home and run for the school board some day. [Laughter]

But I believe that the American people can be told the truth about our long-term challenges. And I believe the American people feel good about the decisions we made that were hard decisions at the time that have brought our country to this moment. And there are still such big things out there.

So what I say is, let's do first things first. Let's lift the burden of your parents' aging off your shoulders by securing Social Security and Medicare. Let's give you a chance to have an even more successful economy than we have today, by getting this country out of debt for the first time since 1835 and taking extra steps to bring money into these inner-city neighborhoods, the rural neighborhoods, the Indian reservations, where there has been no economic recovery.

Let's continue to make sure that we are investing in the education of our young people. We'll still have money for a tax cut that could include long-term care, child care—for me, helping ordinary families save for retirement; but the main thing is not so much what the elements of it are, but that it's not so big that it either throws us into debt or requires us to compromise our future.

Now, that is the way I see this. I wonder if 36 years from now you will remember what was going on in Washington with the same clarity that I remember. But I can tell you, it was by no means certain that Congress and the country would do the right thing on civil rights. Indeed, President Kennedy, when he